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ABSTRACT

Designed as a diagnostic tool for assisting early childhood and kindergarten teachers, the Sentence Repetition Task seeks to distinguish children who speak a different dialect and are normal in language development from children who speak a different dialect and are developmentally delayed. This technique is based on the work of Menyuk (1964), Slobin (1967), and Baratz (1969). The instrument focuses on whether a child is repeating abstract terms (Function Words Correct), is developmentally delayed (Function Word Omission), or is reconstructing (word is changed to an equivalent form in poverty vernacular). Sentences were designed to yield two scores, the Reconstruction Score and the Function Word Omission Score. Included in this document are discussions of previous research, explanation of procedures for administering the instrument, mean scores derived from studies of a sample of low socioeconomic status children in New York City, sentences, lists of function and reconstruction words, scoring rules and key, and references. (JM)

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SENTENCE REPETITION TASK

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CS 201 461

Baratz using a sentence repetition task was able to demonstrate that black speakers of non-standard vernacular (also called black English) were more adept at repeating non-standard sentences than were white middle-class children. Rural white, inner-city, and rural black children who live in poverty conditions speak a variant of white middle-class vernacular. This language is a sufficient language in that it serves a sub-cultural group, but it contains some forms uncommon in standard vernacular as well as some forms which are variants of standard.

Baratz (1969) identified the common differences between black inner-city vernacular and white middle-class English.

Written	Linguistic Feature	Oral Expression
John's house	possession	John's house
John runs	3rd single present	John run
ten cents	plural	ten cent
He jumped	past	He jump
She is a cook	copula	She a cook
He doesn't have any toys	negation	He ain't got no toys He don't have no toys
He asked if I came	past conditional question	He asked did I come
Everyday when I come he isn't here	negation to be	Everyday when I come he don't be here

In addition to these forms Labov (1973) reported the following phonological differences:

1. r less-ness — guard = God
2. l less-ness — tool = too
3. simplification of consonant clusters — past = pass

The Sentence Repetition Technique is designed as a diagnostic tool to assist early childhood education and kindergarten teachers in distinguishing children who speak a different dialect and are normal in language development from those children who speak a different dialect and are developmentally delayed. The technique is based on the work of Menyuk (1964), Slobin (1967), and Baratz (1969).

Developmental Delay

Menyuk demonstrated that when children were asked to repeat well-formed English sentences, they would omit portions of the sentence which were beyond their level of language development. For example, if the child had not mastered the past tense, the child would omit those features of the language. Slobin found similar results with young children. Slobin's and Menyuk's list of sentences are appropriate for children below the age of five. The utility of the technique is that the investigator or teacher can determine from the types of omissions the child makes where on a continuum of development the child is in his acquisition of standard English forms.

Culturally Different Children

Children who come to school speaking a variant of standard English frequently have been classified as deficient in language acquisition (Deutch, 1965). Those psychologists who hold a genetic-deficit position have postulated that culturally different children are deficient due to genetic constraints (Jensen, 1969). However, ample data are now available to refute this socially and biologically naive theory (Scarr-Salapatek, 1971; Anastasiow & Hanes, 1974, and Labov, 1973).

4. weakening of final consonants — mend = men
5. lack of /i/ and /e/ distinction
6. lack of distinction of /ih/ and /eh/ before /r/
7. /ay/ and /aw/ sound like /ah/

In addition, Labov indicates that inner-city speech contains a unique form which he has called the "negative attraction." For example, "It ain't no cat can't get in no coop" translated into white middle-class English becomes: "There isn't any cat that can get into my pigeon coop."

Language Development Beyond Five

Contrary to former beliefs, all children continue to master the more complex forms of English after the age of five. Double consonants in medial positions, such as "twelfth," continue to pose problems until the child is approximately eight. Further, Piaget (1962), H. DeZwart (1973), and the cognitive linguists (see T. E. Moore, 1973) have pointed out that language acquisition is a product of cognitial acquisition. Language follows the path of cognitive development rather than preceeds it. Thus, the more complex forms of logic and grammar are not mastered by the child until 8 to 12 years of age. Anglin (1970) has postulated that some forms, particularly abstract relationships, are acquired after the child is 12 and are not fully mastered until adulthood. Examples of such logical constructions are "if-then," "either-or," and abstract relations which are found in the function words of "while," "because,"

"then," and "but." Thus, too often children who speak a different vernacular are perceived to be lower developmentally than they actually are. Their so-called lower status may be on dimensions all children have difficulty with.

The Sentences

A further problem in assessing the child who resides in poverty is that frequently he does not respond to an investigator's questions as freely as a middle-class child. Asking lower-class children to respond to "What did you do on your vacation?" or "What did you watch on TV?" leads to one word responses on the part of the child. Part of the problem is cultural: The child may not have been on a vacation. Part of the problem is linguistic: The child will say "look at TV" not "watch TV," and watch as pronounced in non-standard vernacular has homonyns which do not mean "to look at."

The sentences were designed to yield two scores. The first score is Reconstruction Score. This score is a measure of how many words that have equivalents in non-standard dialect the child "reconstructs" or changes to his own vernacular. For example, the child might repeat: "She isn't a good singer" as "She ain't no good singer." At least one standard form which has an equivalent form in non-standard vernacular is included in each sentence. Most sentences have more than one form that can be reconstructed into non-standard vernacular.

The second score is Function Word Omissions. The sentences were constructed to contain at least one abstract function word to determine the degree of difficulty children are having with these forms. It is suspected that children with high function-word omissions scores are

developmentally delayed in their language acquisition (Anastasiow & Hanes, 1974).

Procedures For Administering

In the sentence repetition task the child was asked to repeat the stimulus sentence exactly as presented. If the child did not give a complete, verbatim repetition to the example sentence in the standard instructions, the instructions were repeated until a verbatim response was given. Also, if during the task the child refused to respond to three consecutive stimulus sentences, the instructions including the example sentence were repeated. We advise pre-recording the sentences. Select for your speaker a voice which is relatively free of regional dialects so that your measure is one of the child's ability to understand middle-class, white vernacular. The standard instructions are:

> "These machines are tape recorders. Have you ever used a tape recorder before? Would you like to tell this tape recorder your name and how old you are?
>
> (replay the tape so that the child can hear his voice on the tape recorder)
>
> Now we are going to play a game. To help us play this game we will use these machines (point to the two tape recorders). This machine will say some words to you (point to the large tape recorder). What I want you to do is to say exactly what it says, into this machine (point to the small tape recorder). For example, suppose the machine says, "The man is tall," what would you say? (if the child repeats correctly, continue; if not, repeat the example again).
>
> Now, listen to what the machine says and then you say exactly what it says, O.K.?"

Function Words

Content words relate actual physical or psychological events to a specific meaning. Common content words include 'boy', 'girl', 'dog',

'cow', and 'ball'. Function words do not contain a specific meaning, but specify relationships between content words. Frequently used function words include 'now', 'because', 'when', and 'any' (Neisser, 1967). Function words are grammatically more complex since they relate symbolic representations within a semantic expression (Brown, 1973). A common research finding is the lack of function words in samples of young children's language. Brown reasoned that the lack of function words in child language was due to the greater grammatical and cognitive complexity involved in processing function words.

Diagnostic Tool

The instrument is designed to aid the teacher in determining whether a child is repeating abstract terms (Function Words Correct), is developmentally delayed (Function Word Omissions) or is reconstructing (word is changed to an equivalent form in poverty vernacular). In addition, a fourth category was added. It was found that children would substitute words for the ones they were asked to repeat. The words substituted frequently were equivalent to the one given in the sentence; for example, for "neater" the child might substitute "cleaner." These substitutions are considered correct if they maintain the meaning of the sentence.

The instrument is a diagnostic tool to aid the teacher in determining the child's approximate linguistic and cognitive status. It is not meant to be a normed test although language norms were used in constructing the sentences.

In the studies conducted to date the following mean scores were obtained from a sample of low SES children in New York City.

Function Words Correct:

	Grade		
School	1	2	3
1	27.85	32.44	34.83
2	29.28	31.83	34.16
3	28.36	31.20	32.00

Function Word Omissions:

Grade	
1	9.44
2	7.22
3	6.17

Inner-city black children tend to reconstruct about 58 percent of the words in the sentences. The following tables included the sentences, the list of function words, reconstruction words and scoring rules and key.

Sentence Repetition Task

1. He was tied up.
2. She isn't a good singer.
3. Where can he do what he wants?
4. Then he went to the movies by himself.
5. She said, "Whose toys are those?"
6. Did an accident happen while your mother was in the store?
7. Jim, who tried to escape, was caught and then beaten up.
8. Although I want ice cream, I bet I'm not going to get any.
9. The boy was hit by the girl who jumped rope in the street.
10. He runs home quickly after school because he has a bicycle to ride.
11. If you want to see an elephant's baby, then you will have to go to a zoo.
12. Joe is good when he feels like it.
13. His mother wouldn't let him go to school because he had no shoes to wear.
14. I think Mary is absent because her mother thought she was sick.
15. The boys were given lots of milk by the ladies in the lunch room.
16. You should either say nice things to your friends or not say anything at all.
17. Joe has to be quiet in class or his teacher won't let him have recess.
18. Joe fell down the stairs while his mother talked to the baby.
19. The teacher will give you a smile when you have finished your work.
20. If your papers are neater then your teacher will be happier.
21. She's got a lollipop which she's going to give me if I'm nice to her.
22. I asked him if he did it and he said he didn't do it.

23. What are you doing tomorrow morning after you've eaten breakfast?

24. He couldn't have any ice cream because his sister ate it all up.

25. Although Jimmy felt sick he came to school.

26. Half of nine is not four, because four and four makes eight.

27. His mother will give him a cookie when he has eaten his supper.

28. That animal is not dead because it is still moving.

Scoring Rules for SRT

Function Words

Scored correct if:

1. Verbatim repetition
2. If stated twice, once correct, the other time wrong
3. In sentence 8 ("although") bears similarity to ("ah-toe" or "ah-so")

Scored as substitution and correct if:

1. Function word substitution retains full meaning of the sentence.
2. In sentence 13 ("wouldn't") substituted by "didn't, or "doesn't
3. In sentence 16 ("or not") substituted by "or don't," or "say nothing"
4. In sentence 20 ("neater" and "happier") substituted by "cleaner" and "nicer"
5. In sentence 22 ("didn't") substituted by "not" or similar negative
6. In sentence 9 and 15 retention of passive structure requiring use of "by" regardless of the noun in the phase.
7. In sentence 10 ("after school"), after may be substituted by another temporal preposition (for example, "before school")

Scored error if:

1. Response given is incorrect according to the Key and not a valid substitution

2. Words are distorted beyond intelligibility. This happened if the response simply could not be understood, although it was evident that a sound was made in the correct "response slot"

Reconstruction words:

Scored correct if:

1. Response stated is verbatim
2. Response is stated twice (once verbatim, the other time wrong or reconstructed)
3. Response is contracted onto a noun or pronoun (for example, "teacher'll" instead of "teacher will")

Scored as a reconstruction and correct if the word(s) or phrase(s):

1. Is clearly in reconstructed form as stated on scoring guide
2. Is said twice (once reconstructed, the other incorrect)
3. Is expanded from a contraction (for example, "she has got" instead of "she's got" or more formal English, such as "she has;" also in sentence 13 ("had no") to "didn't have any;" and in sentence 21 ("she's going to") to "she is going to"

Scored as an error if the reconstructed word(s) or phrase(s):

1. Is inappropriate responses: not a reconstruction
2. Is distorted beyond intelligibility
3. In sentence 7 ("beaten up") was altered to "beat him up"
4. In sentence 9 ("jumped") was altered to "that had the rope."
5. In sentence 13 ("had"), 10 ("has"), 17 ("has, have"), and 19 ("have") was pronounced "ha..."
6. In sentence 11 ("will have") was altered to "won't have" or "don't have"

Scored omission if functon or reconstruction word(s) or phrase(s):

1. Is not repeated in the response sentence
2. If no response was made to the stimulus sentence
3. If background noise or sound reproduction affected discriminability of the word(s).

Scoring Key for Function Words

1. ---
2. ---
3. Where . . . what
4. Then
5. Whose (retention of interrogative)
6. Did (retention of interrogative). . . while
7. who . . . then
8. although
9. by the girl (retention of passive marker) . . . who
10. after school (retention of temporal) . . . because
11. If . . . then
12. when
13. wouldn't (retention of negative) . . . because
14. because
15. by the ladies (retention of passive marker)
16. either . . . or; not (retention of negative conditional)
17. or
18. while
19. when
20. If . . . then; neater . . . happier (retention of comparative)
21. which . . . if
22. if . . . didn't (retention of negative)
23. what . . . after
24. couldn't (retention of negative) . . . because
25. Although
26. because
27. When
28. because

Scoring Key for Reconstruction Words

1.	was tied	got tied
2.	isn't a	ain't no; ain't a
3.	wants	want
4.	movies	movie
5.	said . . . toys	say . . . toy
6.	Did . . . mother	was . . . noun variant
7.	was caught . . . beaten up	got caught . . . got beat up; beat up; got beaten up
8.	I'm not going to	I ain't gonna; I not gonna; I'm not gonna
9.	was hit . . . jumped	got hit . . . jump, was rope jumping, was jumping rope
10.	runs . . . has	run . . . have
11.	elephant's . . . will have	baby elephant; elephant baby . . . have; got
12.	is . . . feels	be; delete . . . feel
13.	had . . . shoes	have, didn't have no . . . shoe
14.	is . . . was	be; delete . . . got
15.	boys . . . lots	boy . . . lot; alot
16.	things . . . friends	thing . . . friend
17.	has . . . have	got . . . get
18.	stairs . . . talked	stair . . . talk
19.	will give . . . you have . . . finished	be giving; give . . . you (delete have) . . . finish
20.	papers . . . will be	paper . . . be
21.	She's . . . she's . . . I'm	she got, she has got or she has . . . she going, she is going . . . I be; I
22.	if . . . said	did . . . say
23.	are . . . you've eaten	delete; be . . . you eat
24.	ate	eat
25.	felt . . . came	feel . . . come
26.	is not . . . makes	ain't . . . make
27.	will give . . . he has eaten	be giving; give . . . he eat
28.	is not	ain't

The following tables indicate the common error, omission, and substitution of children in three areas: two metropolitan inner-cities, and one rural south appalachian. The results are analyzed by location and race of the child. Separate tables are provided for Function Word Omissions, Substitution and Errors and Reconstruction Word Errors, Omissions, and Reconstructions.

FUNCTION WORDS
Rural Appalachia

		Blacks (N=48)			Whites (N=212)		
Word	No.	Error	Omis.	Subs.	Error	Omis.	Subs.
Where	3	3	4	0	28	16	0
What		8	3	0	15	12	0
Then	4	0	5	0	2	19	0
Whose	5	0	2	21	1	2	19
Did	6	2	3	1	0	11	6
While		0	5	18	6	25	94
Who	7	2	30	0	0	126	4
Then		0	40	1	3	171	1
Although	8	9	16	6	46	62	5
By the girl	9	1	6	3	4	30	15
Who		0	13	8	3	70	89
After school	10	8	15	0	36	89	0
Because		1	13	0	2	57	0
If	11	2	3	0	2	24	0
Then		0	33	0	0	189	0
When	12	0	3	0	3	6	6
Wouldn't	13	1	1	5	0	4	22
Because		0	2	0	3	16	1
Because	14	4	10	0	1	49	3
By the ladies	15	13	11	6	67	63	20
Either	16	3	46	0	0	223	3
Or not		7	13	9	9	53	56
Or	17	3	8	3	5	33	19
While	18	0	1	6	10	9	24
When	19	2	2	6	1	9	22
If	20	1	4	5	27	21	4
Then		0	39	0	3	179	0
Neater		4	3	1	15	26	7
Happier		14	4	1	31	19	1
Which	21	0	39	9	7	188	16
If		0	11	3	4	36	1
If	22	0	12	21	1	67	61
Didn't		1	5	1	3	24	3
What	23	1	3	0	0	7	0
After		0	4	9	3	16	51
Couldn't	24	0	0	1	4	3	5
Because		1	2	0	16	12	1
Although	25	5	16	0	5	69	1
Because	26	2	26	0	5	123	1
When	27	1	1	5	9	3	77
Because	28	2	6	0	2	26	0

UNIQUE RECONSTRUCTIONS
Rural Appalachia

		Blacks (N=54)			Whites (N=211)		
Word	No.	Error	Omis.	Recon.	Error	Omis.	Recon.
was tied	1	1	0	0	3	2	0
isn't a	2	7	0	2	22	2	10
wants	3	0	2	8	1	10	11
movies	4	0	1	15	4	4	10
said	5	0	5	2	0	35	6
toys		0	2	1	1	1	7
did	6	2	4	1	0	14	7
mother		0	5	1	2	18	5
was caught	7	4	27	3	18	88	18
beaten up		1	22	12	5	87	37
I'm not going to	8	1	7	39	14	25	118
was hit	9	4	2	7	5	18	21
jumped		4	7	14	13	43	46
runs	10	8	3	17	15	12	29
has		10	5	16	2	25	23
elephant's	11	1	0	24	11	7	28
will have		1	3	27	4	17	95
is	12	0	2	0	4	4	0
feels		0	2	24	6	5	29
had	13	1	1	32	5	6	121
shoes		1	1	1	3	4	2
is	14	11	12	3	74	46	3
was		4	9	5	7	43	28
boys	15	0	4	12	2	18	21
lots		1	12	11	7	55	88
things	16	1	4	14	6	33	28
friends		2	4	21	0	39	62
has	17	1	4	11	5	14	29
have		2	11	3	14	30	9
stairs	18	1	0	10	0	6	9
talked		1	4	15	18	7	112
will give	19	1	2	4	2	4	1
you have		1	2	22	4	7	108
finished		1	2	21	5	8	22
papers	20	0	3	21	2	18	51
will be		0	4	9	3	20	14
she's	21	1	7	18	8	27	51
she's		0	23	12	2	102	25
I'm		1	7	19	11	28	79
if	22	0	12	19	2	28	63
said		0	8	1	1	42	1
are	23	4	6	0	16	11	2
you've eaten		3	4	32	2	15	136

Word	No.	Error	Omis.	Recon.	Error	Omis.	Recon.
ate	24	0	0	1	2	1	33
felt	25	2	0	4	20	9	15
came		0	2	7	10	11	88
is not	26	7	22	4	21	99	27
makes		7	12	16	45	68	47
will give	27	0	0	5	8	1	11
he has eaten		22	0	19	73	3	81
is not	28	2	3	7	8	7	47

FUNCTION WORDS
Inner-City

Blacks (N=230)

Word	No.	Error	Omis.	Subs.
where	3	6	4	0
what		29	2	1
then	4	4	4	0
whose	5	0	1	53
did	6	2	15	4
while		4	10	62
who	7	1	49	6
then		3	58	0
although	8	31	35	2
by the girl	9	14	23	12
who		9	73	34
after school	10	37	85	0
because		3	30	0
if	11	8	36	0
then		2	143	0
when	12	4	12	4
wouldn't	13	8	5	35
because		5	16	0
because	14	3	23	0
by the ladies	15	62	53	2
either	16	16	132	0
or		16	25	8
not		16	40	57
or	17	10	26	40
while	18	12	9	35
when	19	17	7	23
if	20	4	26	28
then		20	143	34
neater		19	25	1
happier		75	22	1
which	21	3	148	17
if		4	33	10
if	22	5	22	127
didn't		1	5	1
what	23	4	8	0
after		5	9	18
couldn't	24	0	4	7
because		2	3	0
although	25	42	45	9
because	26	3	49	0
when	27	3	9	62
because	28	3	23	0

UNIQUE RECONSTRUCTIONS
Inner-City Black
(N=210)

Word	No.	Error	Omis.	Recon.
was tied	1	5	1	0
isn't a	2	14	2	8
wants	3	0	3	65
movies	4	0	1	67
said	5	5	19	33
toys		1	2	23
did	6	4	13	4
mother		2	5	6
was caught	7	22	39	24
beaten up		7	28	64
I'm not going to	8	17	6	91
was hit	9	5	10	43
jumped		18	30	122
runs	10	15	8	77
has		62	14	72
elephant's	11	1	2	118
will have		11	3	81
is	12	8	7	0
feels		2	6	113
had	13	5	0	120
shoes		1	1	11
is	14	67	20	17
was		4	11	32
boys	15	5	9	32
lots		5	34	64
things	16	6	6	56
friends		2	14	99
has	17	21	10	97
have		25	27	6
stairs	18	0	3	43
talked		8	4	123
will give	19	12	1	16
you have finished		10	5	106
papers	20	5	12	49
will be		10	15	39
she's	21	10	31	108
she's		19	70	73
I'm		7	24	72
if	22	7	16	128
said		2	39	38
are	23	8	12	11
you've eaten		12	8	154

Word	No.	Error	Omis.	Recon.
ate	24	2	1	1
felt	25	20	9	21
came		4	5	6
is not	26	34	50	11
makes		3	28	81
will give	27	10	4	15
he has eaten		13	3	132
is not	28	19	4	15

FUNCTION WORDS
Inner-City

Puerto Rican (N=124)

Word	No.	Error	Omis.	Subs.
where	3	14	4	0
what		17	7	0
then	4	3	7	0
whose	5	36	4	1
did	6	8	15	0
while		5	12	75
who	7	3	55	6
then		1	83	0
although	8	21	41	1
by the girl	9	9	22	10
who		3	41	19
after school	10	35	64	0
because		6	42	0
if	11	2	13	3
then		1	92	0
when	12	5	3	1
wouldn't	13	2	5	44
because		5	14	0
becau e	14	4	19	0
by the ladies	15	39	32	17
either	16	7	105	0
or		2	23	10
not		2	28	55
or	17	3	18	29
while	18	14	13	30
when	19	15	2	8
if	20	23	11	12
then		1	92	26
neater		6	13	6
happier		43	9	1
which	21	4	88	22
if		9	36	10
if	22	18	21	0
didn't		3	9	5
what	23	1	11	0
after		13	17	32
couldn't	24	1	2	10
because		3	6	1
although	25	21	39	4
because	26	2	76	1
when	27	8	9	35
because	28	5	14	0

UNIQUE RECONSTRUCTIONS
Inner-City Puerto Rican
(N=124)

Word	No.	Error	Omis.	Recon.
was tied	1	0	1	2
isn't a	2	11	3	7
wants	3	1	7	20
movies	4	0	0	46
said	5	0	12	24
toys		2	4	19
did	6	8	15	0
mother		2	10	0
was caught	7	9	52	6
beaten up		4	60	34
I'm not going to	8	15	29	79
was hit	9	13	10	18
jumped		8	23	67
runs	10	21	14	32
has		16	32	35
elephant's	11	7	0	49
will have		6	7	79
is	12	5	2	0
feels		2	5	50
had	13	18	5	105
shoes		1	5	6
is	14	52	14	2
was		1	17	8
boys	15	6	5	3
lots		3	23	68
things	16	6	13	29
friends		0	14	81
has	17	14	14	27
have		18	36	13
stairs	18	0	6	20
talked		5	4	79
will give	19	4	2	4
you have		6	3	92
finished		6	1	100
papers	20	3	7	37
will be		7	8	8
she's	21	2	39	85
she's		3	42	50
I'm		4	38	49
if	22	10	22	9
said		3	36	15
are	23	7	16	7
you've eaten		23	18	85

Word	No.	Error	Omis.	Recon.
ate	24	2	4	7
felt	25	7	13	40
came		6	14	31
is not	26	13	61	16
makes		0	49	58
will give	27	3	1	10
he has eaten		10	5	96
is not	28	5	8	18

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